



100th Anniversary of the Council on Christian Unity

Worship Resources

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12. Second Sunday of Advent: Peace Sunday **Sunday, December 5, 2010**

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[Materials marked with an asterisk * were developed by Linda McKiernan-Allen and Ron Allen.]

Focus for Today*

The worship resources developed over this centennial year of the Council on Christian Unity focus on various aspects and forms of Christian unity—among churches, across Christian movements, within congregations as people of multiple racial and ethnic groups and gender orientations seek shared ecclesial life and witness. The church is supposed to be a sign to the world of God's purposes. Therefore, the work of the Council on Christian Unity points beyond the church. The CCU can help both Christian and non-Christian individuals and groups participate in God's great community of love, justice, joy, dignity, mutual respect and support, and peace.

The Second Sunday of Advent often emphasizes peace. How can the church receive the gift of peace and reinforce its witness for peace? With these resources, the church may think about peace within the church and as well as God's intention for all in the world (including elements of nature) to live in peace. In its root sense, *shalom* (the well-known Hebrew word for peace) refers not only to the absence of conflict but to communities living in relationships of support and encouragement. At its fullest, *shalom* is relational and communal.

Within situations of conflict, individuals and communities can experience a dimension of peace. In this sense, peace may not be a feeling of quiet and serenity but a sense of being aligned with

God's purposes even when others reject those purposes. The Second Sunday of Advent reminds the church that God gives this gift even when the storms of life are raging.

An irony of recent history—especially recent history—is that efforts to witness to peace often bring individuals into conflict with those who compromise the way of peace. Disruption may come when believers include those who take refuge in instruments of war or profit from war. To be sure, advocates of peace sometimes disagree with regard to the best strategy for going forward, but the church needs to disagree respectfully. The church needs to find ways to witness to peace that are themselves peaceful. And the church needs to respond to attacks upon its witness for peace not with self-righteousness and anger but with a spirit that is itself peaceful even while its witness is strong.

Worship and preaching on this Second Sunday of Advent not only speaks about the peace that passes understanding that is God's gift to the church, but also commissions the church to call for peace in congregations, cities, states and nations. At its best, worship today becomes an experience of peace. The service can be a *prolepsis*, an anticipation of the great eschatological peace.

Preachers, worship leaders, and congregations sometimes need to monitor their language about Christ and peace. We often say things like, "Christ brings peace on earth." Such expressions have two problems. First, they imply that there was no peace before the coming of Christ. In fact, the desire for *shalom* is at the heart of the Torah, Prophets and Writings. Christ was not the first to bring peace; Christ confirmed and re-presented the way of peace. Second, such sayings imply that peace is here. That, of course, is not true. The world is as fragmented and violent today as it was in any period of the Torah, Prophets and Writings.

Christ reasserted the intention of God for all to live together in peace. Christ offered guidance in the ways of peace that reaffirmed or extended ways towards peace in the Torah, Prophets and Writings. From the viewpoint of the end-time (apocalyptic) characteristic of many Jewish people (including Paul and the writers of the first three gospels), lasting peace will not arrive until the second coming. In the meantime, there are moments of peace here and there, anticipating the Realm. And within the conflicts that accompany the coming of the peaceful world, faithful witnesses often experience moments of peace.

The resources for this Sunday are the last ones to be generated in connection with the 100th Anniversary of the Council on Christian Unity. They come, of course, in the season of Advent, which is the beginning of the Christian Year. As such, the location in the Christian year of this installment of worship resources reminds ministers and congregations that while the leadership of the Council and the work of finding partnership in mission is a century old, the efforts represented by the Council need to begin again in every generation in response to changing circumstances. Until Jesus returns, the underlying mission will continue. Yet it takes new forms in new contexts. This same adaptability is necessary in the search for peace. Each generation faces new challenges in the search for peace.

Although many Disciples congregations have followed the Christian Year for a long time, some folk may still think of the weeks prior to Christmas along the same lines as the culture: as getting

ready for Christmas. They may need some explanation as to why the congregation is focusing on John the Baptist and repentance.

Call to Worship*

L: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God

P: “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me” (sing, from CH 677)

L: We gather to worship God, who offers us grace and peace.

P: “With God our creator, children all are we” (sing, from CH 677)

L: We lift our voices, our hands, our hearts

P: “Let us walk with each other, in perfect harmony”

L: Together in God’s peace, let us pray:

Opening Prayer

God of mercy and compassion,

Of grace and reconciliation,

Pour your power upon all your children. . .

Let hatred be turned into love, fear to trust,

Despair to hope, oppression to freedom,

Occupation to liberation,

That violent encounters may be replaced by loving embraces,

(So) peace and justice (shall) be experienced by all. Amen.

[Said Ailaboun: <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Meaning-of-Peace.html>]

Significant Quotes

Peter Ainslie, one of the moving spirits beyond formation of the Council on Christian Unity and of the efforts of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to find common ground with other churches and groups, took an unusually bold stand against war and in behalf of peace. Ainslie wrote his most dramatic statements when the Briand-Kellogg Pact was still in force. This pact, initially signed by 15 nations in 1928 (and including as many as 65 nations by 1933), sought to outlaw war. Ainslie refers to this Pact in connection with his fifth point (*below*).

Ainslie believed, “Written deep in the conscience of [humankind] is reverence for personality [that is, reverence for the individuality of human life]. It is not something we are taught, although teaching may develop it; it is intuitively part of us. This something in us is necessarily weakened when we kill a human being, particularly so is this true if the killing is done *en masse* under the protection of the state as in a case of war. Consequently, war is a moral question of first consideration and becomes associated with murder.” [Peter Ainslie, *Some Experiments in Living* (New York: Association Press, 1933), p. 9. The following quotes from Ainslie are from this book].

Ainslie enumerates “Five Counts Against War.” He uses the word “business” in this context as a general way of speaking about human behavior.

- (1) “War is the most horrible method of the murder business.”
For Ainslie, war is legalized murder.
- (2) “War is the most wasteful business in history.”
War uses resources of all kinds—human, natural, manufacturing—in the service of destruction. This is waste.
- (3) “War is the most senseless business.”
Countries and other groups who have disagreements often try to settle those disagreements not by common sense or reasoning but by turning to brute force.
- (4) “War is the lowest standard of business.”
War licenses all manner of aberrations in human behavior such as lying, stealing, and killing.
- (5) “War is an outlawed business.”
The Briand-Kellogg Pact had outlawed war. To engage in war, therefore, was a criminal act. [pp. 8-20].

Ainslie went beyond objecting to war to envisioning the social transformation of present social institutions into instruments of peace. “The abolition of war is not enough. There must necessarily follow the abolition of the war and navy departments of the government. These cannot function in an atmosphere of peace and friendship. In their stead must come the department of police for the maintenance of internal order and the department of peace for building up friendship between the nations. Likewise, West Point and Annapolis each may become an international friendship university where men and women may be trained to be specialists in international relations. Keep the warships, stripped of guns, in service as a department of the international friendship universities, taking persons, by government appointment, to other nations and, in turn, receiving persons from other nations by appointment of their governments—not on pleasure trips but to gather data and build up attitudes of friendship.” [p. 27].

Catholic theologian Thomas Merton, said: “Where there is a deep, simple, all-embracing love of man, of the created world of living and inanimate things, then there will be respect for life, for freedom, for truth, for justice and there will be humble love of God. ... As long as you see your fellowman as a being essentially to be feared, mistrusted, hated and destroyed, there cannot be peace on earth.”

Other Liturgical Material*

1. God of peace and possibility, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier:
We approach you to ask once again for your mercy, forgiveness and a fresh start.
We ask you to help us give peace a chance, in this world.
We want to give peace a chance, yet we have already missed so many opportunities.
We have sabotaged so much;

instead of overcoming evil with good, we have stood by while good was overpowered.
Forgive us, Lord.

Dona nobis pacem: (could sing, from *Chalice Hymnal*, 297)

Just as we claim your forgiveness, we also claim this moment in the name of peace.
We accept anew our responsibility as peacemakers and creators of justice.
And yet, we know there is much more required if we are truly to give peace a chance.

Dona nobis pacem:

By the moving of your Spirit, commit our hearts and minds to peace.
Help us become the starting-points of peace. "Let this be the moment, now."
Help us cooperate with you, giving peace a chance.
Give us peace, we pray.
Grant us wisdom and courage to seize the initiative:
wisdom to discern the things that make for peace,
and courage to be faithful and obedient to you.

Dona nobis pacem:

God of peace and possibility, make us instruments of your peace
so we may fulfill your will, and give peace a chance.
In the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen

[Adapted from <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/peace-convocation/world-sunday-for-peace/prayer.html>]

2. Chalice Hymnal Advent reading, *The Coming of God*, #123
3. Suggested scriptures for reading, praying, or singing: Psalm 9:18; Psalm 33; Psalm 34:1-22; Psalm 35:10; Psalm 109:21-31; Psalm 113:5-8; Psalm 122; Proverbs 12; 1 Samuel 2:7-8; Isaiah 56; Lamentations 3; John 13, 14; Luke 4:14-21

Invitation to the Table*

This is a table of peace and of love. A contemporary theologian, Frederick Buechner connects the two this way:

"One of the titles by which Jesus is known is Prince of Peace, and he used the word himself in what seem at first glance to be two radically contradictory utterances. On one occasion he said to the disciples, 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword' (Matthew 10:34). And later on, the last time they ate together, he said to them, 'Peace I leave with you: my peace I give to you' (John 4:27). The contradiction is resolved when you realize that for Jesus peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle but the

presence of love." [Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* (HarperSanFrancisco/HarperCollins Publishing House, 1993)]

So as we come to this table, we're invited by love, and blessed with peace. Not so we can hoard these gifts, but so we might be filled up and spill that peace and love into the world.

Come, share the gifts which are freely given for you and for many.

Notes for Preaching (based on the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary for December 5, 2010)

Matthew 3:1-12

The reading from Matthew does not directly address the subject of peace. However, it presupposes a world view in which peace is central, and it prescribes an action necessary for those who seek peace.

The Gospel of Matthew presupposes the same end-time (apocalyptic) world-view as the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts about which we have written so many times in the preceding resources. This way of thinking sees the history of world in two ages: the old age (the present) characterized by the presence of Satan and the demons, idolatry, injustice, social inequality, poverty, violence, sickness, and death, and the coming Realm of God characterized by God's rule in all things, justice, renewed social relationships, abundance, peace, health, and life everlasting (in a resurrection body that will not wear out).

For Matthew, as for Luke, Jesus is God's representative who announces that the Realm is partially present through Jesus's ministry but will come fully only when Jesus returns. In the meantime, the church is to live as a community that embodies qualities of the Realm in its own life and is to invite others (especially gentiles) to become a part of the community awaiting the Realm.

John is an end-time prophet whose goal is awaken people to the imminence of the coming of the Realm and to help them prepare for coming of the Realm by repenting (Matthew 3:1-3). Many other prophets (including the community at Qumran) were saying much the same things. Many Jewish people sought to be free from Roman oppression and from the brokenness of the old age. Many people longed for a world of peace. John's news is that such a world is coming soon. John's distinctive message is that Jesus is the agent through whom God is effecting this transformation.

In Matthew 3:3b, John quotes from Isaiah 40:3. This quote not only emphasizes that John's role is to prepare the way for Jesus (and not to do the work of Jesus), it also places John in the great prophetic tradition of Isaiah. Apropos of the concern for peace today, Isaiah is as eloquent as any voice in the Torah, Prophets and Writings in calling for a world of peace. The reading below, Isaiah 10:1-10, is an example (cf. Isaiah 9:6-7, 52:7, 54:10, 55:12; 57:2, 19; 60:17).

In end-time thought, to repent is to turn away from the old age and its values and to turn towards the Realm of God. John embodies the motif of repentance in his dress and location (Matthew 3:4-6). To repent means to go back to the beginning and to make a new start. John is in the wilderness—emblematic of the world immediately after creation, almost the beginning time. And his dress and food (primitive garments of camel’s hair and leather; basic foods of honey and locust) represent the dress and foods of Eve and Adam just after they were expelled from Eden. However, from Matthew’s perspective, while these things take us near the beginning, John cannot return us fully to Eden to the complete start of a new world. (For end-time thinkers, the end-time would resemble the beginning-time, the world as it was in Eden). Only Jesus can effect a completely new beginning.

With respect to the theme for today, that means turning away from trust in force, violence, and war and turning towards the things that make for peace. The Gospel of Matthew offers some of the most practical and detailed guidance in this new direction in the Sermon on the Mount, especially Matthew 5:21-48. For Matthew the church is to live by these guidelines in its own life and relationships and is to point to them as guidelines for the larger culture.

In the first Gospel, baptism (immersion) has several related meanings. It is a public demonstration of repentance. It is a rite of initiation into the community awaiting the new age. It dramatizes washing away complicity with the old age and turning towards the new.

According to John, the Pharisees and Sadducees who came for immersion were acting not as children of God but as children of the devil (children of the snake: “You brood of vipers”). They want to be included in the Realm, but they do not truly repent. They want to continue to prosper from their collusion with the old age. They want to say, “We’re for peace,” while still preparing for war. God will judge them harshly: God will cut down the tree that does not bear good fruit and throw that tree into the fire. In plain speech, God will cut down every person who does not repent and join the movement towards the Realm and will throw them into hell.

Nevertheless, for all the power of his preaching and ministry, John only prepares the way. During his first coming and especially at his second coming, Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. That is, Jesus will bring the Realm to life and will condemn those who reject it. Indeed, “The chaff [Jesus] will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:11-12).

How is the congregation in collusion with violence—in the home, in the church, in the larger world? Of what do we need to do to repent?

Isaiah 11:1-10

In Jewish covenantal thinking, God made a covenant with Judah, the southern nation (and with Israel, the northern nation). God, the sovereign ruler of history, would bless those peoples if they would live according to the commandments given as part of the covenant. If they disobeyed, then God would punish them. In this perspective, punishment is seldom an end in itself but is intended to awaken repentance which would then lead to a return to faithfulness, and hence, a return to blessing. Isaiah perceived obedience and disobedience, blessing and punishment taking place not merely at the level of the individual person or household but in the national arena.

If the worship space contains PowerPoint and a large screen, the preacher could make effective use of maps that show the location of Judah, Assyria, and Assyrian troop movements. The maps could also show the nation of Israel as a monarchy during the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, and the division of the monarchy into the two nations of Israel (the northern nation) and Judah (the southern nation). Maps could, thus, show the relationship of Israel and Judah. The preacher might also create a PowerPoint time line that would set today's text in the history of Israel.

The prophet whom scholars call First Isaiah was responsible for most of Isaiah 1-39. From Isaiah's point of view, Judah would be blessed and cursed as a nation.

Isaiah 11:1-10 is from the part of Isaiah (chapters 1-12) in which the prophet predicts that God will bring about the downfall of Judah (and especially Jerusalem). God takes this action because of the failure of the community to live according to the guidelines in the covenant (Isaiah 1:4-5, 10-17, 21-23; 3:16-26; 5:1-30; note especially 10:1-4). God would use the military victory of Assyria as the immediate means of carrying out the punishment (Isaiah 10:5-6). Because Assyria was arrogant and idolatrous, God would eventually punish Assyria, too (Isaiah 10:7-19). This much affirms that God

God will preserve a remnant of the community out of which to rebuild Judah (Isaiah 10:20-23). Indeed, God will release Judah from Assyria's grip (Isaiah 10:24-27). Assyria will come down from the north to besiege Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:28-32). However, God will crush the Assyrian army (Isaiah 10:33-34).

Isaiah 10:33-34 introduces the forestry language on which Isaiah 11:1-10 depends. For a few verses, the prophet compares human communities to trees and events in a forest. God will "lop the boughs [of Assyria] with terrifying power." God will cut down the tallest trees. With an axe, God will hack "the thickets of the forest" and fell "the majestic trees" of Lebanon.

But amidst the felled trees of Assyria, the stump of Jesse is still preserved (the remnant). Even if it has been damaged, it will still sprout (Isaiah 11:1). The stump, of course, represents the lineage of Jesse, whose pre-eminent offspring was David, the most powerful and successful ruler in Israel's history. Even if the nation is diminished (as implied in Isaiah 10:1-34), God will still be faithful to the promises that God made to David, and long before, to Sarai and Abram.

God will raise up a new ruler who will be led by the Spirit into essential qualities needed to lead a nation in covenantal living: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, not only reverence for God but delight in such reverence (Isaiah 11:2-3a). Since this is Peace Sunday, integrity requires that we acknowledge that Isaiah assumes that this leader will superintend military armies, but with a good sense of when and how to use them (he will have the spirit of "counsel and might").

The new ruler will not make judgments based on superficial evidence of what the eyes see and the ears hear (Isaiah 11:3b). Instead, led by the Spirit, this monarch will insist that the community live on the basis of the covenant with its commitment to justice for the poor and

equity for the meek. In this setting, the “meek” are the weak, especially those oppressed by the rich and powerful (Isaiah 11:4a).

God will empower this figure to destroy the power of those who oppose God’s purposes, especially those who oppress the faithful (Isaiah 11:4b). This leader’s battle dress includes righteousness and faithfulness. These qualities guarantee that God is acting as Holy Warrior through the actions of the monarch. Preachers and scholars sometimes attempt to soften this picture by suggesting that the ruler destroys evil by means of the spoken word (“the rod of [the monarch’s] mouth”) and with “the breath of [the monarch’s] lips.” Even so, the text clearly indicates that these things will “*kill* the wicked.”

Under the impetus of the Spirit, then, the ideal ruler will eliminate threats to God’s ruler and will bring about a world of covenantal community, at the center of which is peace, *shalom*. Today’s preacher may be deeply troubled (as we are) by the picture of God’s agents *killing* the wicked. Perhaps the preacher could agree with the fundamental goal of this text (to witness to God’s unrelenting desire for a world of *shalom*) while disagreeing with the means (the deaths of the wicked).

As a result of relieving the world of the presence of the wicked, a new age of peace will eventuate not only for human beings but also for nature (Isaiah 11:6-9). The elements of the natural world will be restored to the same quality of relationships they had in Eden. Predators and prey—such as the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf, the lion, and the fatling, the bear and the cow—will lie down together and graze together. The enmity between human kind and nature (represented by the nursing child and the asp, and the weaned child and the adder) will be over. Ordinarily a little child needs to be led, but in the new paradise, the inhabitants are so sensitive to God’s rule that a little child can lead them (Isaiah 11:7-8).

There is no violence in Jerusalem (“my holy mountain,” Mount Zion) in this renewed age. Everything in the restored Eden both knows God’s purposes and lives by them (Isaiah 11:9).

The preacher who has access to PowerPoint and a big screen in the sanctuary could project Edward Hicks’s famous painting, “The Peaceable [Dominion]” during the part of the sermon focusing on Isaiah 11:6-9.

The prophet (or the editor) then placed Isaiah 11:1-10 as a dramatic oracle of salvation to carry the reader beyond the state of affairs described in Isaiah 10:5-34. The purpose of the oracle in Isaiah 11:1-10 is to fire the inhabitants of Judah with the confidence to persevere in faithfulness during the tumultuous, fearful times described in Isaiah 10. Beyond the chaos of the Assyrian invasion, God will provide a secure future for Judah. They should not flinch in front of the Assyrians. Still less should they consider adopting Assyrian deities or practices. A remarkable future awaits—if they endure.

God, working through the ideal leader, is the primary actor in bringing about the restored world of Isaiah 11:1-10. However, the community has a role to play. The community can cooperate with God’s plans to bring about a world of *shalom*, and facilitate the coming of this new world. Or, the community can resist. Those who resist face the fate of those in Isaiah 11:4b.

Christians often associate this new ruler with Jesus. However, most contemporary biblical scholars in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) do not think that Isaiah had Jesus in mind. Isaiah was thinking of a ruler who would arise in Isaiah's own time or shortly thereafter. Yet, a person does not have to be unusually aware of history to know that the events of Isaiah's time did not unfold as the prophet anticipated. The world has yet to become a renewed Eden per Isaiah 11:6-9.

The prophecy of Isaiah 11:1-10 in both its social and cosmic dimensions was important to many Jewish end-time theologians in the period leading up to (and following) the ministry of Jesus. Drawing on this tradition, the gospels portray Jesus believing that the end-time would, indeed, be like the beginning time, a new paradise. Apropos of remarks we made at the beginning of our discussion of John the Baptist (above), this time of fulfillment would not come until the second coming. While Isaiah may not have intended to foretell the coming of Jesus, we can say that Jesus stands in a stream of prophetic hope similar to that of Isaiah.

The caution to the preacher is similar to the one that we articulated at the end of the Focus for Today. The coming of Jesus did not simply fulfill Isaiah's hope. From the perspective of end-time theology, Jesus may have begun the process of the coming of the Realm, it was only realized partially in his ministry (and today). Today's community is in the same place as the community of Isaiah: awaiting the new world. In the meantime, we do what we can to witness to God's desire for all peoples and elements of nature to live together in the kinds of relationships described in Isaiah 11:6-9.

[For more on Jesus as an end-time prophet, see Ronald J. Allen, *The Life of Jesus for Today* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008)].

Closing Prayer

1. Holy God, Let us go in peace.

In the course of this coming Christian year, may the Star of Peace continue to light our path; may we continue to find signs of peace in the faces of all –
men, women, adults, young people and children, wherever we are –
at home, work, school or church, in town or country,
so as to turn our dreams into reality, and bring violence to an end,
“that there may be peace on earth and glory in heaven”. **Amen**

[Adapted from http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2008pdfs/imagine_peace.pdf]

2. The World Peace Prayer

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace

Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe.
Peace, peace, peace.

[Adapted from the *Upanishads* by [Satish Kumar](#)]

Possible Hymns and Songs

(Numbers in parenthesis are from the *Chalice Hymnal*)

“Comfort, Comfort You My People” (122)

“O God of Love, O Power of Peace” (676)

“O Day of Peace That Dimly Shines” (711)

“Dona Nobis Pacem (297) (The congregation could try this in a round)

“Blessed Be the God of Israel” (135)

“One Candle is Lit” (128, verse 2)

Additional Resources

We live in a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants,
in a world that has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience.
We have solved the mystery of the atom
and forgotten the lessons of the Sermon on the Mount.
We know more about war than we know about peace,
more about dying than we know about living.

[General Omar Nelson Bradley, Armistice Day, 1948 cited on
<http://www.paxchristi.org.uk/litgy.HTML>]

Peace Sunday could be a wonderful opportunity to tell the story of Sadako and the Cranes. [For the story, see: <http://www.paxchristi.org.uk/litgy.HTML>] This could be a children’s moment, or a part of a Peace Sunday Advent workshop. A creative Christian Education opportunity might include reading the story, teaching children, youth and adults to make cranes, and then decorating a Christmas tree with folded cranes as part of the sanctuary or fellowship hall Advent/Christmas decorations

For more resources on peace, check the extensive World Council of Churches site:
<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/>

The Writers

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Testament to people who have hardly opened is pages: *New Testament 101: A Beginner's Guide to the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011). In addition to being short and inexpensive, this volume includes questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. It can be used in a small group or for individual reading.